



Prologue

FOR FRENCH IMMERSION AND EXTENDED FRENCH EDUCATORS

A PUBLICATION FOR PROFESSIONAL CONVERSATIONS

Building Language Skills through a Cross-Curricular Approach

The focus of this publication is on the delivery of a program in entry-level classes for French Immersion and Extended French that recognizes the balance between acquisition of language and understanding of content in subjects taught in French. Throughout, there are opportunities for teachers to reflect individually or in professional learning communities on practices that create positive learning environments that foster this balance.

In this publication, you will read about the philosophy and design of program implementation, as well as strategies to enhance the development of students' language skills, critical thinking skills, and knowledge of subject content through a cross-curricular approach.

Prologue is a professional learning publication for educators working in entry level French Immersion and Extended French programs. It includes an element of research, questions for reflection, translations of key educational terms and teacher voice, which are intended to inspire professional conversations. *Prologue* is available electronically in English and French on Curriculum Services Canada's website (<http://curriculum.org/content/home>).



Policy and Program Requirements for French Immersion and Extended French Programs

Considerable evidence exists to support the contention that students can successfully master content-area outcomes through immersion style, content-based language classrooms. Indeed, it would seem that native-like competence in the language of instruction is not absolutely necessary for age appropriate academic development. (Genesee *et al.*, 1989)

French Immersion and Extended French are defined in curriculum documents as French as a Second Language (FSL) programs in which French is not only taught as a subject but also serves as the language of instruction in other subjects regardless of the variety of entry points and hours of instruction.

These policy requirements set out a framework that allows for choice in the delivery model of programming and provides school boards with the flexibility to customize programs to suit the needs of the learners in their districts. The skills and knowledge students acquire contribute to the rich diversity of Ontario schools and prepare them for life and further learning in a global society.

French Immersion and Extended French programs are designed to allow students to develop functional proficiency in French without negatively impacting their progress in English. Students in these programs are expected to achieve the same learning outcomes in the subjects taught in French as students learning in English, at the same time as they acquire a high level of proficiency in French. With this in mind, teachers of French Immersion and Extended French classes plan programs that consider the delicate balance between teaching French as a subject, and developing students' French language and literacy skills as a vehicle for the demonstration of the knowledge and skills for a specific subject other than French.

Students in French Immersion and Extended French programs must have the opportunity to develop the skills required for the 21st century. They build critical thinking skills, become literate in a variety of contexts, including media, and engage in rich learning tasks. The ability to communicate in the French language (oral and written) is a necessary skill in all subject areas; students use language to develop ideas, to understand key concepts, and to articulate thoughts.

The clear intent of the French Immersion and Extended French program design is to promote and support the concept of teaching language across the curriculum. Through this design, students are not only learning to talk but also talking to learn. According to Fred Genesee (2009), "It is not simply amount of exposure but also quality of exposure that can influence children's language development." By raising the quality of language exposure through the cross-curricular approach, students see the interconnectedness of language acquisition and content exploration that is the essence of the French Immersion experience.

The most important discovery I have made in the last few years as an Extended French teacher is that I see myself not as a “French teacher” but rather as a “classroom teacher who teaches in French.” This has influenced my teaching practice including planning and assessment in a very positive way and I believe that my students have greatly benefited from this.

Grade 5 Extended French teacher

Further findings through a study conducted by Florence Stevens (Concordia University, 1976) underscore the importance of pedagogical factors and quality of instruction in building language proficiency. She found that students in the French Immersion and Extended French programs achieved high levels of success when they participated in individualized, activity-based programs where language use was embedded in interesting and engaging activities.

This is especially true in the entry years of the programs. Students in entry-level classes require time to develop skills in using French as the language of the classroom, but at the same time they are required to use French to demonstrate their learning related to the curriculum expectations for the subjects taught in French from the first few weeks of entry.

Teachers in entry year classes must explore teaching and learning strategies that contribute to the development of the whole child as well as to the acquisition of vocabulary and language structures and must continue to place an emphasis on students’ use of language in meaningful contexts.

Inquiry-based Learning

From early learners to adolescent learners, as students develop both language skills and thinking skills, teachers of French Immersion and Extended French develop programs that support inquiry and problem-based learning.

Inquiry-based learning is student-centred and student-driven since it focuses on and grows out of the interests of the students in the class. During an inquiry process, teachers and students formulate questions, investigate, discuss, and reflect on results to arrive at appropriate resolutions. Questions like « Comment les changements dans la nature affectent ce que nous faisons? » in a Grade 1 class, to « Comment les dirigeants communautaires peuvent collaborer pour résoudre un problème communautaire? » in a Grade 7 geography class, are open-ended questions based on curriculum expectations.

REFLECTION How do I create a language-rich, meaningful learning environment in my classroom regardless of the subject I am teaching?

REFLECTION How do I establish and maintain a classroom environment where French is the language of inquiry in subjects other than French?

See *Prologue: Acquisition of Oral Language as a Foundation for Literacy* for further information on strategies.

REFLECTION How can I ensure that the students in my class develop the language to interact in French as they learn?

Oral skills – both speaking and listening – are at the very foundation of literacy. Classroom talk helps students to learn, to reflect on what they are learning, and to communicate their knowledge and understanding. (*Think Literacy*, 2003)

In French Immersion and Extended French entry-level programs, teachers develop strategies for students to engage in inquiry-based learning. By using literacy strategies like shared reading and read alouds, teachers can introduce new, precise, and technical vocabulary. This contributes both to the scaffolding required for students to use the language independently and for providing a print-rich environment.

When language is introduced and built in meaningful contexts, students acquire language in both social and academic classroom activities. They are then able to use appropriate language to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the concepts and content of subjects taught in French as well as interact with peers and teachers. In this way, acquiring and using language in authentic and functional ways deepens the students' knowledge and contributes to their gradual proficiency in French.

In every classroom, students develop language and learning skills at different rates; therefore it is important that teachers develop learning tasks that promote differentiation as well as collaboration. Learners in entry years should have the opportunity to explore ideas and information through learning centres; they should work in pairs and in small group learning situations. During this process, the teacher is available to monitor and facilitate student work in terms of ideas and also in terms of language development.

I made a major shift in practice in the last couple of years in my class. Instead of developing a unit or theme such as Seasons or Fall, I have moved to an inquiry model to develop a bigger question like, « *Comment la nature change-t-elle?* » I set up centres and document the students' work and their language development, and try to add vocabulary related to students' needs. I am so impressed with the development of language for these children.

Senior Kindergarten teacher

Accountable Talk

Oral language development is crucial. Students need language to respond to a range of meaningful interactions on a daily basis both from a social and an academic perspective. Engaging in **accountable talk** stimulates students' higher-order thinking – it helps them learn, reflect on their learning, and communicate their knowledge and understanding.

They need to be able to:

- talk to their friends, family, teachers, and the community;
- express feelings;
- ask and respond to questions;
- engage in higher-order thinking;
- think critically and talk about issues that affect their daily lives;

→ accountable talk
discours responsable

See *Learning in the Fields: The Student Work Study Teachers Initiative, 2009-10* for more information on accountable talk.

- state and support preferences and opinions;
- analyse issues and situations;
- solve problems;
- read and respond to a variety of texts;
- use language specific to the subject content.

To promote accountable talk, teachers create a collaborative learning environment in which students feel confident in expressing their ideas, opinions, and knowledge, and in exchanging ideas. Teachers support accountable talk in French by paraphrasing and repeating student responses in order to provide students with appropriate, precise language, prompting when necessary, and giving feedback. Student responses can be recorded and made available for reference.

REFLECTION How can I document student talk and student learning?

Program Planning

An essential aspect of quality programming is the development of long-range plans based on subject-specific curriculum expectations that take into account the instruction of content as well as the language associated with the content.

REFLECTION How do I develop a program plan that reflects the needs and interests of students?

In the entry years of the French Immersion and Extended French programs, teachers often begin the year with topics that may be familiar to the students and are more concrete than abstract. For example, in mathematics, they may start with number sense as students need time to develop language to be able to read and respond to word problems.

Purposeful talk is one of the major means through which children construct and refine their understandings of language. Talk should underpin all language activities. (*First Steps*, 1997)

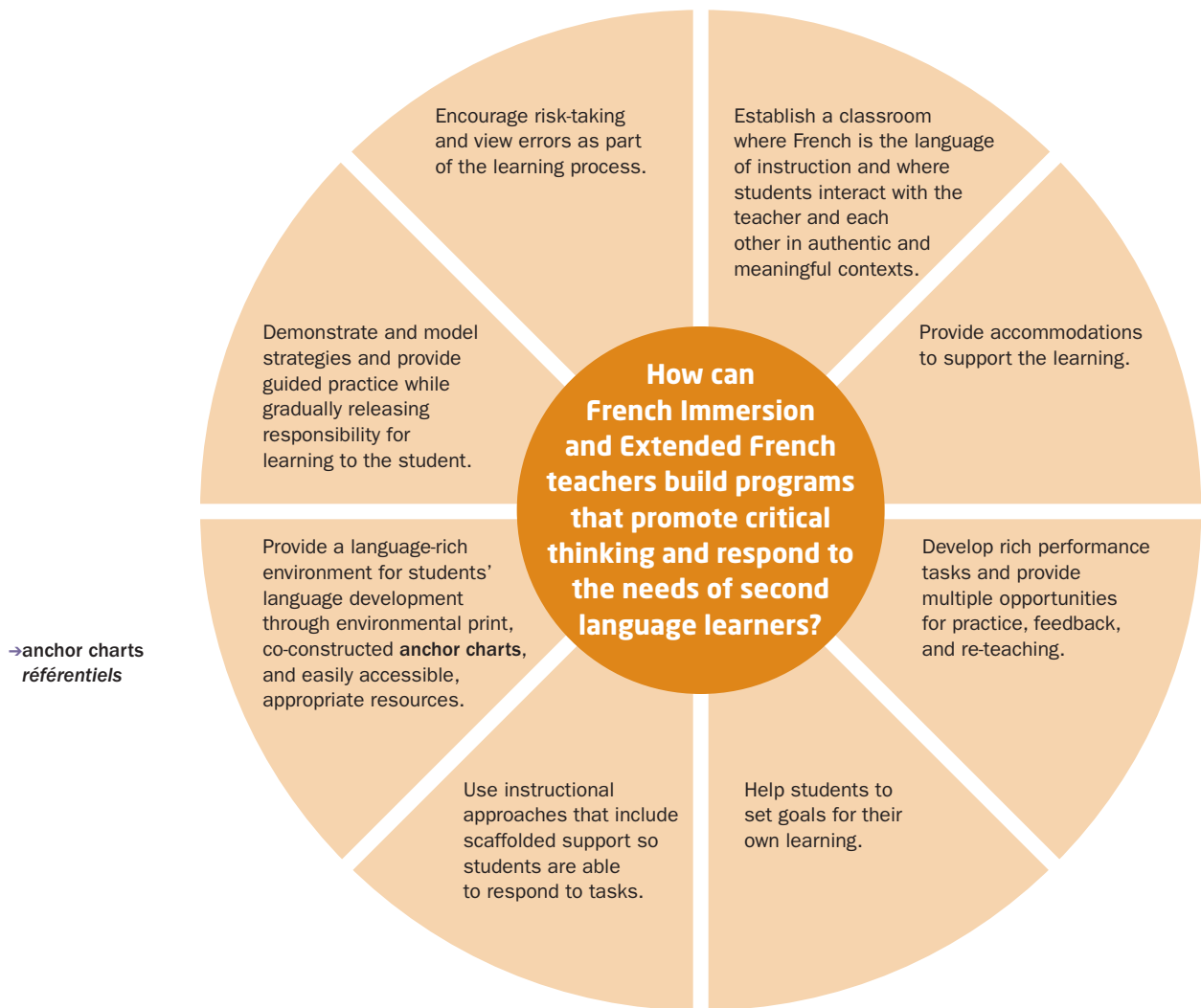
As they build their program plans, teachers are also sensitive to the interests and needs of their students and review and revise their plans accordingly.

In my Grade 1 class, I developed an inquiry unit based on living things. I had the students go outside and investigate the schoolyard and make notes about their findings and then I began to prepare centres for exploration. One day, a student brought in a bird's nest with eggs that had been opened. The class was fascinated and I realized I could add the nest to the centres so that students could touch and examine it. I then had to revise my initial plan to include the life cycle and was able to introduce the vocabulary that they would need to discuss this topic.

Grade 1 French Immersion teacher

See *Prologue: Acquisition of Oral Language as a Foundation for Literacy*

French Immersion and Extended French teachers at the entry level build programs that promote critical thinking and respond to the needs of the students learning in French. They place strong emphasis on the strategies needed to promote both student engagement and student achievement.



I have taught Grade 4 Extended French for several years. I always start the year with geography since it is about the provinces of Canada. I find that the students are familiar with the content and most of the general vocabulary, that way I can teach more specific vocabulary as it is required for students to use in oral and written work.

Grade 4 Extended French teacher

A Framework for Planning

As they plan their French Immersion and Extended French programs, teachers:

- review the overall expectations in the curriculum for each subject;
- determine the “**big ideas**” and “cluster” expectations;
- plan with inquiry-based learning in mind by developing essential questions based on the big ideas;
- capitalize on students’ prior knowledge and experience;
- identify key vocabulary and language structures;
- examine the curriculum expectations with respect to what “makes sense” to evaluate at the beginning, middle, and end of the year for students who are developing language skills;
- select appropriate resources that include narrative, non-narrative, and media texts to allow for differentiation.

→big ideas
idées maîtresses

I realised very quickly that for my intermediate Extended French class I needed to carefully select resources for the students. I choose short texts and make sure that there are a variety of text features. Things like subtitles, photos and pictures, legends, index and glossaries provide support to the written text and make it more accessible to the students. We can discuss not simply the information of the text but how to read the text.

Grade 7 Extended French teacher

Gradual Release of Responsibility

In French Immersion and Extended French programs, teachers play a key role in the development of language skills by creating a safe and positive classroom environment that supports the use of French at all times. Listening to and viewing French for a variety of purposes creates for the students a basis for response and interaction, and develops literacy skills. The conditions that encourage students to speak and listen also provide a solid foundation for the development of reading and writing skills.

While it is important for teachers to work strategically with the whole class, it is also very important to develop the strategies for the **gradual release of responsibility** that allow for the students to become more and more independent over time. Critical to this process, especially for students in French Immersion and Extended French, is **scaffolding** by the teacher so that students have the tools necessary to work on and complete tasks in all subjects on their own or collaboratively.

By thinking aloud as they talk, teachers give students insights into how to interact and present ideas, as well as provide them with models for effective oral communication. (Green et al., 2011)

→ gradual release of responsibility
délégation graduelle de responsabilité

→ scaffolding
étayage

REFLECTION How do I encourage the learning of subject-specific content, skills, and language in my classroom?

Careful consideration of resources contributes to building learner autonomy. In the early years, students must be able to access and refer to texts that are read by the teacher. Students should also have access to other resources including media texts that are rich with visual cues to support comprehension. The use of both narrative and non-narrative texts for shared reading and writing promotes the introduction and use of content-specific language in an engaging and relevant way.

At the junior and intermediate entry levels, students often have subject-specific textbooks that may be too challenging for them. Teachers can support the students' use of textbooks by carefully selecting the passages and making use of text features.

They explicitly teach literacy strategies and use modelling, demonstration, and think alouds as well as the technical language associated with the big ideas for the subject curriculum so that students can interact with text, with each other, and with the teacher as they complete tasks.

The same approaches to teaching and learning apply in all literacy programs for all students, regardless of their first language or language of instruction. They include a strong oral language component, scaffolding on prior knowledge and experiences, and a focus on higher-order thinking and critical-literacy practices.

Literacy for Learning 2004

Professional Resources

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